

PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS TO AETCOM MODULE ON EMPATHY FOR FIRST MBBS STUDENTS

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Abstract

Background: The goal of undergraduate medical education program as proposed in the revised Graduate Medical Education Regulations (2017) is to create an “Indian Medical Graduate” with appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and responsiveness. AETCOM module introduced by MCI as part of the new Competency Based Medical Education Curriculum recognizes the need to teach professionalism as a formal part of the undergraduate training.

Methods: This is a cross sectional observational study conducted over a period of one month involving first year MBBS students who joined in the year 2019-20 in Municipal Medical College in Mumbai. 169 students were included in this study. The teaching schedule of AETCOM Module had four sessions as given in the guidelines by MCI. At the end of session student’s perception was obtained on Likert scale and analyzed.

Results: Out of the 169 students who volunteered for the module 62% strongly agreed whereas 37% agreed that the module created interest in the subject. A majority of the students (98%) opined that the AETCOM Module will improve their future interaction with patients. Students’ also positively appraised the AETCOM module for gaining insight into patient’s rights as also being useful for themselves and in future practice. They also preferred multiple similar modules throughout the UG course.

Conclusions: The AETCOM Module will be good for the first MBBS students for understanding the importance of empathy in patient interaction. A detailed evaluation of other AETCOM modules and a follow-up study to evaluate the long-term impact of the modules would be required.

Keywords: AETCOM, Perception, First MBBS Students

Introduction:

Knowledge, clinical skills, attitude and communication form an integral part of medical education. Attitudes are expressed in the form of behaviour and the concept of AETCOM believes that changing a person’s behaviour can change his attitude.¹In the earlier curriculum these soft skills were part of the hidden curriculum and imbibed from teachers. The “Competency Based Undergraduate Medical Education Curriculum 2019” has introduced a structured program on “Attitude, Ethics and Communication”. It aims to introduce and impart necessary knowledge and also skills to be a medical professional and effective physician. This is especially important in today’s era because of increasing conflicts between doctors and patients.^{2,3} The Indian Medical Graduate should be aware of the rights of the doctor and patients as also the ethical issues in doctor-patient relationship.

Empathy in healthcare plays an important role in patient experience and is an important factor for healthy doctor-patient relationship. Humanism in healthcare is characterized as “a respectful and compassionate relationship between physicians, members of the healthcare

and their patients”.^{4,5} Empathy is an emotional experience between an observer and a subject in which the observer, based on visual and auditory cues, identifies and transiently experiences the subject’s emotional state. In medical field “Empathy is ability of physician to acknowledge the emotional state of the patient accurately as well as to demonstrate that understanding to the patient”.^{6,7} The AETCOM module 1.2 under Competency based medical education is about understanding empathy in patient encounters. The present study aims to evaluate student’s perception about the module.

Materials and Methods:

It was a Cross sectional Observational Study done involving First MBBS students who joined in the year 2019-20 batch in Municipal Medical College in Mumbai done after getting approval from Institutional Ethics Committee. Informed consent of the students was obtained and among the 200 students 169 students participated in the study. The Teaching Schedule of AETCOM Module 1.2 (What does it mean to be a patient?) was systematically designed and planned. The objectives of the module were listed and four Sessions were included as per the guidelines provided by MCI AETCOM module booklet. The first session was an

exploratory session with an introduction to the topic. It included enquiry about their views on health, disease and suffering. Discussion included personal ill-health or someone they knew in the family. How did they think it affected patient's behaviour, outlook and expectations? The second session consisted of exposure to cases in which students were allotted patients in the hospital and they interviewed them about their experiences, reactions,

emotions and expectations. The third session consisted of student's reflection about their experience based on the sessions. A closure session where students shared their reflections and discussion of their experiences. A feedback was taken at the end of the session to know student's perception about the module.

Results:

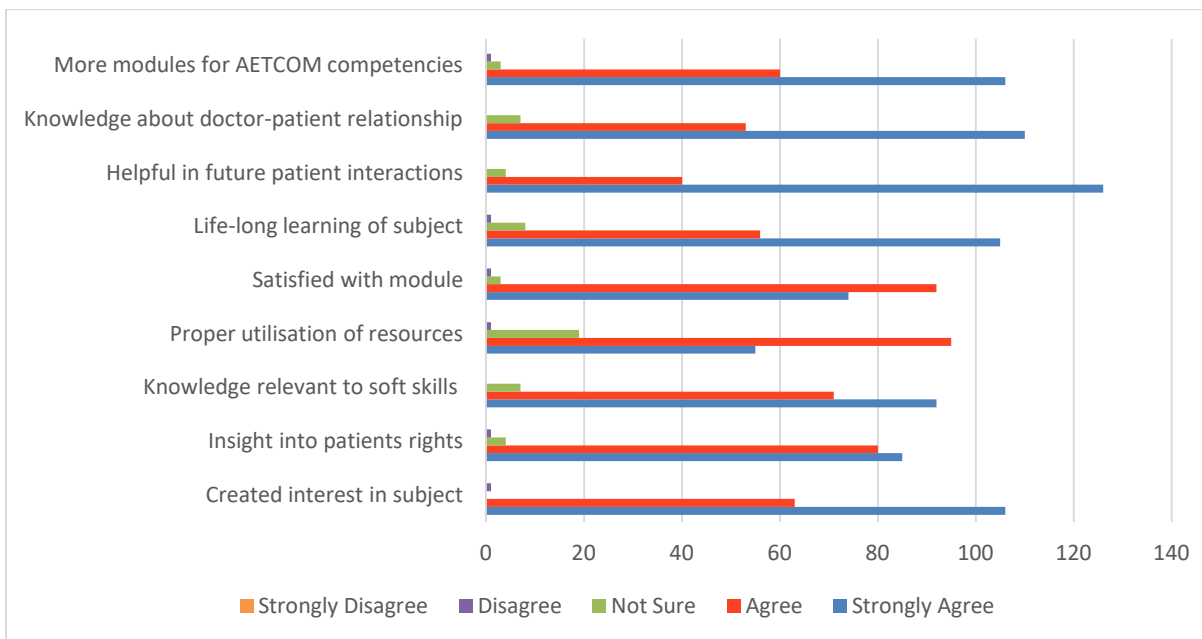


Figure 1 Students Perception to AETCOM Module on Empathy

Out of the 169 students who volunteered for the module 62% strongly agreed whereas 37% agreed that the module created interest in the subject. Also 43% students strongly agreed and 54% agreed that they were satisfied with the module. There was also positive appraisal by the students as to the module providing insight into patients' rights and knowledge relevant to soft skills. 98% of the students agreed that the module would help them in future patient interactions and had also helped in life-long learning of the subject (Figure 1).

Some of the attributes of the module which the students liked were visiting the wards, talking with the patients and understand how he feels about the treatment given by hospital staff. There were suggestions like they wanted to visit different wards and spend more time with the patients. One response also noted that the time when they interacted with patients opened new horizons.

Discussion:

The Medical Council of India has introduced AETCOM training module for medical students. Varma J et al. measured the student's attitude to communication skills using a modified communication skills attitude scale. They however found a high prevalence of unfavorable attitude about communication skills as a subject in medical

students.¹ The new competency based medical education has introduced structured AETCOM module. The module 1.2 deals with empathy in patient interaction. Empathy is an emotional experience between an observer and a subject which the observer identifies and understands based on the subject's feelings.⁸ In the module the students had to recollect their emotional state during a similar situation which helped them to relate to the patient's current emotions. In the past, empathy was considered an inborn trait that could not be taught, but research has shown that communication skills training helps to improve patient satisfaction.⁹ There have been contradictory views on the utility of empathy in medicine. Hirsch EM also observed that being detached helps the physician to take objective decisions.⁸ De Vignemont F and Jacob P concluded that empathy must be supplemented by other experiences like sympathy and care. In the present study we evaluated the student's perception to the module. The students positively appraised the AETCOM module as helping to generate interest in the subject and also provide insight into patients' rights and facilitating future interaction with patients. A detailed evaluation of other AETCOM modules and a follow up study would be required to understand the long term impact of these modules.

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